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AUTHOR	Mims, J. Sabrina; Slovacek, Simeon; Wong, Gay Yuen
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how the Accelerated Schools Model has served as a catalyst for transforming the Charter School of Education at California State University, Los Angeles. The Accelerated Schools Project has been one of the largest and most comprehensive school restructuring movements of the last decade. The focus of Accelerated Schools is developing school cultures that are dedicated to providing highly enriched educational experiences for all children. The article begins with an overview of the Accelerated Schools Project and the Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Center and then continues with a discussion of the Charter School of Education at California State University, Los Angeles and its transformational process in terms of philosophy, implementation, and evaluation. The Charter School of Education was approved to operate as a charter school of higher education in 1994. As the first charter school of higher education in the United States, the school is freed from many system requirements, policies, and premises, allowing more creative experimentation in the teaching of teachers. The change processes at the university and the process at K-12 accelerated schools are described to share their parallel characteristics. The article concludes with discussions of the implications of the project for the future professional development of teachers and how the design of new programs should be largely driven by what is being learned in current K-12 reform efforts. (Contains 11 references.) (SLD)

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J. Sabrina Mims, Simeon Slovacek, Gay Yuen Wong
California State University, Los Angeles

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Transforming a School of Education via the Accelerated Schools Model

J. Sabrina Mims, Simeon Slovacek, Gay Yuen Wong
California State University, Los Angeles

"If there was any hope of addressing the issue of chronic underachievement and the impact of a child's environment on learning, then a bold new model for education and training had to be developed and implemented."

--Dean Allen Mori,
Charter School of Education
California State university, Los Angeles

Introduction

The Accelerated Schools Project, founded by Dr. Henry Levin and associates at Stanford University in 1986, has been one of the nation's largest and most comprehensive school restructuring movements of the last decade. Its focus has been on transforming school cultures that slow down the learning process with low expectations into cultures that are dedicated to providing highly enriched educational experiences for all children. In order to sustain and institutionalize effective practices learned through reform efforts such as these, not only do K-12 institutions need to transform, but also institutions of higher which prepare future educators. The purpose of this article is to describe how the Accelerated Schools Model has served as a catalyst for transforming the Charter School of Education at California State University, Los Angeles (CSLA) into the first such charter school in the United States.

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The article begins with a brief overview of the Accelerated Schools Project and the Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Center (LAASC) in order to build a conceptual framework. The article continues with a discussion of the Charter School of Education at California State University, Los Angeles and its transformational process in terms of philosophy, implementation and evaluation. Next, a comparison of the change processes at the university and the process at the K-12 accelerated schools will be presented to share parallel characteristics of both. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of the implications for the future professional development of teachers and how the design of new programs in teacher education should be largely driven by what we are learning through current K-12 reform efforts. It is the authors' premise that teacher educators should "walk the talk" about school reform and practice the processes they advocate for K-12 schools.

The Accelerated Schools Movement

From 1986 to 1996 the Accelerated Schools Project has moved from a two-school pilot project to a national movement of over 1000 schools in 40 states. This very rapid expansion has been attributed to the growing number of school communities perceiving a need to change in order to address more effectively the demographic, sociological, and economic needs of their populations. In addition, the expansion has been prompted by the accomplishments of accelerated schools such as greater student achievement and learning, enriched curriculum and instruction, increased family and

community involvement, and improved school climate (Mimes, Brunner & Meza, 1997). Integral to the Accelerated Schools Project is a philosophy based upon the three principals of **Unity of Purpose**, **Building on Strengths**, and **Empowerment with Responsibility** and a systematic process of school transformation. This includes (a) forging a shared vision, (b) taking stock of the current situation in the school, (c) setting priorities for moving the school toward the vision, (d) forming a new governance structure around those priorities, and (e) utilizing the inquiry process to address areas of challenge.

Henry Levin, founder of the Accelerated Schools Movement, was first among school reformers to recognize that the transformation of a school into an accelerated school needs effective nurturing over time, and that this post-training follow-up (or coaching) could not be effectively conducted from a single national center. Levin established Accelerated Schools Satellite Centers and trained coaching teams in different parts of the nation. Members of these Satellite Centers and their trained coaching teams are charged with launching accelerated schools and providing their communities with support until their transformation process is completed and they have become learning organizations capable of self-renewal. (Brunner, Heelen, & LeTendre, 1995).

The initial expansion to regional satellite centers was funded by Chevron. In 1988, after the initial pilot schools had finished their first year as accelerated schools, the National Accelerated Schools Center team developed a plan to expand the Project with the help of university-based satellite centers. At the same time, Chevron USA President, Will Price, asked his Community

Affairs staff to develop an action plan around the following three objectives: (1) to detect the key problems facing the American education system, (2) to determine how these problems were addressed by US companies, and (3) to identify a program for educational renewal that would be worthy of Chevron support. The study team analyzed more than 250 programs before it chose the Accelerated Schools Project as the centerpiece of its educational initiative. (National Center, 1991)

The National Center staff, in collaboration with the Chevron Corporation, selected four Colleges of Education to house the first Accelerated Schools Centers. The universities selected were California State University, Los Angeles, San Francisco State University, the University of New Orleans, and Texas A&M. During the next four years, staff at these four Centers and the National Center at Stanford University went through an intensive training and learning process which produced results that far exceeded original expectations in terms of the impact of the Project on educational renewal and children's lives (National Center, 1994).

The Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Center at California State University, Los Angeles

The Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Center (LAASC) was established in the spring of 1990 as a result of the three year grant from Chevron, USA. The Center's initial staff included three faculty members and the Dean of the School of Education. Each member worked on Center part-time in addition

to fulfilling their other university assignments. Their original pilot school was a large elementary school located in South Central Los Angeles with a student population of 700. The Center's staff followed the Accelerated Schools process by taking stock of its strengths and challenges and then created a vision for the center. The Center's staff also identified eight goals back in 1990, from which it has never strayed. These include the following:

1. Increase involvement of university faculty, students and staff in Accelerated Schools activities.
2. Establish Accelerated Schools sites where parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, students and community members are effectively implementing the Accelerated Schools reform models.
3. Disseminate Accelerated Schools information through presentations and publications.
4. Support existing Accelerated Schools in attaining their visions and becoming model sites.
5. Strengthen our communications network with Charter School of Education divisions, clusters, committees and projects through collaboration, meetings presentations, technology, newsletters, retreats, publications, and other activities.
6. Infuse the Accelerated Schools philosophy in the School of Education through courses, field experiences, internships, and related activities.
7. Expand our capacity as a self-supporting center through grants and other resources.
8. Strengthen our communications network with other Accelerated Schools Centers through regularly scheduled meetings, technology, correspondence, retreats, publications, etc.

In 1992, in cooperation with the National Center the LAASC staff launched the first Accelerated School District in Redondo Beach, by adding four new schools, four new district coaches, and 1570 additional students. The first year-round multitract school was then added in 1993 with a student population of 1600, along with the a middle school having a student population of 900, bringing the total to seven schools served by the Center. ***The Accelerated School***, the only K-6 approved state charter school located in

South Central Los Angeles, was added as the Center's eighth school in 1994. Over this five year span, the LAASC staff grew from 3 faculty members and the Education Dean at one California State University site to eight faculty members, the Dean of the Charter School of Education, 3 graduate interns, and 1 student assistant from two California State University sites in order to provide the extra support to the additional school communities. (Faculty and staff from California State University, San Bernardino were added to the LAASC team through the coaching and mentoring model in 1993.)

The Center staff currently support elementary and middle schools in four school districts, totaling approximately 5000 students. In addition to their work at public school sites, the Center staff also conduct Regional Network meetings with Accelerated Schools in Southern California, Accelerated Schools seminars for (CSLA) teaching interns who later do their internships at one of the local Accelerated School sites, and are in the process of developing a Master's degree program on School Reform.

In an attempt to institutionalize the Accelerated Schools model throughout the Charter School of Education at CSLA, the Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Partnership was formed. The Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Partnership is composed of the Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Center (LAASC), ***The Accelerated School*** (the first Charter K-12 school in South Central Los Angeles), the California State University Charter School of Education, and local businesses and community members.

The Charter School of Education at California State University, Los Angeles

The School of Education at California State University, Los Angeles (CSLA), was approved to operate as a Charter School of Education in 1994 by California State University (CSU) Chancellor, Barry Munitz. It is also the nation's first school of (higher) education so authorized. Its charter, like those of a growing number of elementary, middle and secondary schools across the nation, releases the Charter School of Education from many system requirements, policies, and procedures thus allowing it to "engage in creative experimentation" (Selkin, 1997). It is significant that a school of higher education has been granted permission to operate flexibly under the otherwise strict regulations of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

Under the leadership of Dean, Allen A. Mori, the Charter School of Education began its transformation by using a self-designed procedure for change. Although the charter released the School from many of the regulations that tend to stifle creativity and innovation (such as a program review process that typically took a minimum of five years to introduce a new degree program), it remained for the Charter School of Education to define the process for its own restructuring. In order to build upon the strengths of effective collaboration and partnerships that had been nurtured over the years, the School looked to successful public schools with which it had been working on which to base its unique design. The Accelerated

Schools model was a fundamental driver of not only the inspiration to change, but also for the process and governance of that change (Selkin, 1997).

With the change in the Charter School of Education came new, interdisciplinary ways of approaching critical issues, based on the school-as-a-whole (SAW)/ work group system (cadre) used by accelerated schools (Selkin, 1997; Hofenberg et al, 1993). Dedicated to the idea of "forging a shared vision", the School's faculty, administration, staff and community supporters met to that end, while at the same time forming work groups to assess or "take stock" of its strengths and chalienge areas. The School's original structure that grouped the various educational disciplines by divisions - Administration and Counseling, Curriculum and Instruction, Special Education, and Educational Foundations and Interdivisional Studies-- still held. Still, added to that were the cadre-style transdiciplinary "clusters" that focused on urgent priority areas such as literacy, school reform, program evaluation and assessment, technology, and more. Although participation in clusters was voluntary for faculty, staff, students, and other community members, the response was enthusiastic and productive. Seven clusters were formed the first year. In addition, the governance structure of the Charter School of Education was changed to give the clusters a strong voice in governance. Table 1 represents the governance structure before the restructuring.

-- Insert Table 1.--

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Table 2 represents the Charter School of Education's new governance structure.

-- Insert Table 2.--

As one can see from Table 2, the Clusters and Themes represent a strong voice, vote, and presence in Charter School of Education operations. Since members are self selected (by interest) into clusters, clusters provided a clear and exigent opportunity for experimentation and collaboration.

The Charter School of Education faculty seek to infuse the Accelerated Schools transformational philosophy throughout the curriculum, organization, and instructional practices. An example is ***The Accelerated School*** which has been launched as a model lab K-12 school and the centerpiece demonstration site. New, innovative courses and pilot programs are also being developed through the clusters along with career ladder opportunities for parents, faculty, and staff at the various other K-12 Accelerated Schools sites as well as other K-12 schools in the service area of the University. This parallels the process that takes place as the individual K-12 public schools that adopt the Accelerated Schools Project model for their own transformations.

The Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Partnership was formed in order expand the scope of the project with ***The Accelerated School*** and to offer greater stability in funding. The Center's activities now are viewed as part of the primary mission of the CSLA Charter School of Education and the Center

is now officially recognized as the Reform Cluster of the CSLA Charter School of Education. Though outside funds are still needed, the flexibility offered through the Charter helps in establishing a strong network of commitment towards this effort.

Parallel Processes

One of the primary areas in school transformation is governance, which drives the communication and decision-making processes of institutions. Traditional schools are based more on a top-down, authoritarian governance structure where key decisions are made primarily by administrative staff or the school administrator. In accelerated schools, the entire school takes part in a more democratic governance structure by setting the agenda and making decisions collaboratively. This model allows the "School as a Whole" consisting of teachers, parents, staff, administrators, and community representatives to be the primary decision making body and to take the responsibility for how the school community will accomplish its goals.

Once an accelerated school has forged its vision, taken stock, and set priorities, decision making teams are formed around each priority area. These teams, referred to as "cadres" form the first level of governance in an accelerated school. In the Charter School of Education, "clusters maintain a similar function. The second level of governance in an accelerated school is the Steering Committee, consisting of cadre representatives, administrators,

and representative support staff, students, parents, and community. The Steering Committee serves at least six purposes. The first and foremost is to ensure that the cadres and the entire school are moving in the direction of the school vision. It also serves as a clearinghouse of information, a vehicle for communication and dissemination, a means of monitoring cadre progress, a guide to help cadres and groups develop and refine recommendations, and lastly as a mediator between the school administration and the cadres so that all are informed of the activities of other cadres as well as new information coming into the school. The steering committee, like the cadres, can spark collaboration among school community members and the private sector, thus expanding the voice and influence of both. The Charter School of Education also has a steering committee which functions almost identically to the steering committee in an accelerated school.

The third and final level of governance is the "School as a Whole" which refers to all administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, students and community representatives. The SAW is given the responsibility of approving all decisions that have implications for the entire school. At the first level, the cadres make recommendations for potential action plans. These, in turn, are reviewed at the second level, the steering committee. It is at the third level, with the SAW, that decisions are approved, allowing input and participation from all interested stakeholders. As previously mentioned,

the Charter School of Education created a SAW which again functions much like the SAW in an accelerated school.

Thus, the development of the present clusters, themes, steering committee, and SAW in the Charter School of Education are based on the Accelerated Schools model. Some of the primary differences are meeting times and group composition. The Charter School of Education has faced similar challenges as those in the public schools in arranging convenient meeting times to allow for collaboration between all stakeholders. All in all, results of a Self Study Evaluation (Hafner, 1997) indicate that the shift in governance resulting from the Charter process has been a rewarding one. Collaboration, teaching quality, student advocacy, equity, and diversity are all seen as areas of strength resulting from the transformation. Both faculty and staff agree that the School has experienced a great deal of success and progress in moving through the Charter process, and that morale has remained high in operationalizing changes over time.

Recommendations based on the Self Study (Hafner, 1997) for other schools of higher education who may be interested in pursuing Charter status are as follows:

- First, develop a mission and vision statement that is descriptive of your school and program.
- Second, develop a statement of core values, guiding principles and goals.
- Third, get support from your university's administration and from your school's faculty.
- Fourth, develop a model and governance structure that are not separate from existing programs and structures.

- Fifth, involve staff and members of the community, and create a broad-based advisory board.

- Sixth, develop an evaluation plan that includes evaluation questions, data, collection methods, and respondents. Survey students, faculty, staff and alumni about important domains. Use multiple methods of collecting data.

- Eighth, use a rubric to measure your school's progress on your goals.

- Ninth, search for internal university and external funding to support collaborative, innovative initiatives and efforts.

- Tenth, do not be dissuaded or influenced by skeptics who maintain "This is just another reorganization." If your aim is truly to transform your School of Education into a standards- and outcomes-based institution that prepares well-grounded professionals, you must be able to create from the bottom up new structures and processes organized for student and teacher success. Charter Schools of Education should not be schools that are merely organized differently, but should be "break-the-mold" schools (Hafner, 1997).

Conclusion

As we continue with our work in the Accelerated schools' movement, we find ourselves more and more intimately linked to the interplay of the transformation of both K-12 and higher education. While inter and inter-institutional collaboration began as a unique and innovative experiment to merge theory with practice, it has since evolved into a habit where non-collaboration is no longer an alternative. As coaches and partners to the accelerated schools within the Los Angeles network, and as participants in the transformation of our own Charter School of Education, we have been able to deepen our own appreciation for the effectiveness of the accelerated schools process as a tool for educational change. We had watched with pleasant

surprise as the challenges, milestones, and eventual successes of the Charter School of education's reform path mirrored those of the K-12 schools. The LAASC team experienced even greater satisfaction with the knowledge that the process in which the Charter School of Education engaged in for higher education reform paralleled the Accelerated Schools model.

The Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Center and its network of schools continue with their work in helping schools to generated higher student performance and more effective teaching among their faculty. It is important to remember that the Accelerated Schools process is a cyclical and continuous one. One does not finish with reform and hence fall comfortably into another routine. Every new school year, or when needed, the accelerated schools take another picture of the "here and now" to re-identify priority areas, form new or on-going cadres, and proceed to do the work for the current year, using the inquiry process, to bring the school closer towards its vision. When assisting our schools in their on-going reflections and actions, we at the LAASC have also found it necessary to constantly reflect and assess how we function in our role as a change partner. We have revised many of the ways we do our business in the last eight years. The most noticeable evolution is the formation of new partnerships, not only with other K-12 schools but also with other universities and funding agencies in the public and private sectors. We continue to be amazed at the flexibility and adaptability of the Accelerated Schools model as we collaborate with new partners.

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One example of such a partnership is with the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP). LAAMP is the ambitious plan developed by Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to meet the Annenberg challenge to reform and improve public education for the children of America. The Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Center and LAAMP partnership came about after the successful establishment of ***The Accelerated School*** as the first charter Accelerated School in LAUSD. Having been established with Accelerated Schools as their model for reform, the next logical step for ***The Accelerated School*** was to join the LAAMP family of schools. How successful the school will be in merging its three years as a successful accelerated charter school with the LAAMP action principles remains to be seen.

In addition, the Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Center has also joined in partnership with the Lincoln DELTA Family, another LAAMP family of LAUSD. California State University, Los Angeles's partnership with the Lincoln DELTA family is unique in that the Los Angeles Accelerated Schools Center is the major collaborator representing California State University, Los Angeles. Using the Accelerated Schools model as a tool, LAASC's charge is to facilitate the improvement of classroom instruction through professional development. The challenge lies in the situation where all LAAMP schools follow the LEARN model, LAUSD's own district developed model for reform. Since LEARN is a model that bases much of its philosophy on accelerated schools principles and values, the challenge will be to determine if

the two reform efforts can coexist and enhance the Lincoln DELTA Family's change process. This remains to be seen.

The issue of multiple change models existing within one school, family, or school district is an important one to study. Accelerated Schools, LEARN, The Coalition of Essential schools, Success for All, and others have been working in a number of schools and school districts across the nation for many years now. The successes and disappointments of each model are documented in the change literature. We at the LAASC have been looking at similarities and differences of the models for many years, both for academic reasons and as well as practical ones. The teachers, administrators, parents funders, and community members want to know which is the best vehicle for change for their own school family. As change partners, we need to help the stakeholders find an answer that really works for them. Hopefully by modeling the change process ourselves in our Charter School of Education, we will be better equipped to do so.

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